

Muhammad in the Mirror of Islam

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point

Islam and other religions, importance of the individual, Islamic world view, equality, realism, knowledge and wisdom, and the spiritual path.

Islam and Other Religions: The Shi'ite View

In the Name of God, Most Merciful and Compassionate

Islam is based on two realities: the blessed personality of the Prophet Muhammad, who was chosen exactly fourteen lunar centuries ago to deliver God's message and to be the leader of mankind; and the Qur'an, the Book from God which is the Prophet's enduring miracle and which contains God's words in the form of intellectual and practical teachings of a universal nature.

These two realities must be considered as one of the most important factors in the development and perfection of human life, or rather, they are the most important factor to have manifested itself over the course of fourteen centuries in the faith and practice of hundreds of millions of men, extending its influence deep into every aspect of their society.

It is true that of the world's religions Islam is the youngest and that its followers are fewer in number than the sum of the adherents other faiths, yet Islam is possessed of certain distinguishing characteristics which sets it apart from other religious

ways. For example, if we refer to the sacred books of Hinduism, and in particular the Veda, we see that the religious teachings presented there are almost exclusively of an ascetic nature and at the same time that they are directed towards a minority of the religion's followers. Thus, the majority of Hindus are excluded from deriving direct .spiritual benefit from these sacred books

Buddhism and also Christianity display with Hinduism the same exclusively ascetic outlook in their teachings. In the case of Christianity this is obvious from the four Gospels and the other basic religious texts. There are no practical injunctions or social .laws and moreover philosophy and rational thought are looked upon with disfavor

The Divine Sacrifice and the remission of the sins of mankind are doctrines which .reduce the relevance of injunctions concerned with this world

Other religions have either ceased to draw men to themselves, such as Sabeanism .and Manicheanism, or else are limited to a particular race of people, such as Judaism

Thus it is only Islam which gives first importance to rationally demonstrable beliefs and positive individual and social injunctions, as, it is hoped, the present paper will .make clear

The Prime Importance of the Individual from the Point of View of Human Nature

Human nature seeks no more than to perpetuate as far as possible its own existence and to achieve its instinctive desires. If the first step man takes in his development is to form social groupings, and if he preserves these societies by acting in accordance with their laws–thus surrendering to the same extent

a degree of his individual freedom, it is in order that by depriving himself of one portion of his freedom he gain and benefit from another portion by being better able to provide for his innate requirements and his subsistence.

The first goal of creation is the happiness of the individual; the happiness of society follows upon this. In other words the purpose of creation is the perfection of human nature, and this perfection is realized in the being of the individual, not in the shape and form of society. Thus, man is directed towards the formation of social groupings to preserve the individual.

For in order that he may realize the fundamental purpose of life-happiness and well-being-it is necessary that he should follow an orderly system of living, a system which inevitably must be social. He must eat, drink, clothe himself, sleep, rest, wed, bear offspring, secure his needs, and through the use of his mind provide the means of his own subsistence.

The Effect of the World View of the Individual upon his Activity

The form and characteristics of this orderly system which man follows in his life is dependent upon his conception of the nature of the Universe and of himself, who is an inseparable part of that Universe. Thus we see that a group of men do not admit the existence of a creator for the world and imagine that the world came into being accidentally and that man is only this material form which comes into existence at birth and ceases to exist at death.

These

men organize their way of life and rules for living with a view to the material needs of their ephemeral earthly existence, and this alone . They follow a path which can lead .to no more than a limited material happiness and well-being

On the other hand those who accept a creator for the universe and believe that the regulation of the affairs of men and of the world is in the hands of "the gods" do not consider man's life to be just this material existence; they organize their way of living in such a way as to attract the favor of the gods and keep away their anger, and in this manner to achieve happiness in life and remain safe from unpleasant .occurrences resulting from gods' wrath

Again, those who accept the Unity of God and believe that the Universe and all that is in it is governed by One God who is All-Wise and All-Powerful, and that man does not cease to exist at death but lives an eternal life, will organize their lives accordingly, .that is, with an eye to assuring felicity in both worlds

It is thus clear that "religion" is the organization of life, and that life lived according to a program is religion. Those who try to separate religion and life and claim that the first of these is only empty formalism are sadly mistaken. It is in view of this that Islam calls the path one follows in life "religion", while it

calls the true way the "Straight Path" and the false way the "Deviated" or "Crooked :Path". God says

The curse of Allah is on evil-doers, who debar (men) from the path of Allah and would" (have it crooked, and who are disbelievers in the Last Day." (Qur'an ٧: ٤٤-٤٥.)(١

The Islamic World View

point

The concept upon which the Prophet of Islam founded his religion is that all of existence has been created by the One God, and that every one of the parts of existence is directed by God towards the perfection and happiness peculiar to that part. Man also, who possesses eternal life, is directed towards the happiness and welfare peculiar to his nature; and this he gains by following the path shown to him by .God

The Holy Prophet addressed his message to natural man, that is, man endowed with human nature and God-given intelligence and will who is not tainted by superstition and blind belief. Such an individual with his God-given primordial nature has the innate .capacity and ability to apprehend the above- described world view

With the slightest reminder he naturally understands that the world in its vastness and grandeur and its perfect arrangement and order is the creation of a transcendent Creator whose infinite Being is the source of every beauty and perfection and who is above all ugliness and evil. Such an individual understands that the creation of the world and its inhabitants was not without meaning and purpose; that the life of this world

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١ - This and all subsequent quotations from the Qur'an are from the translation by .Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall, The Meaning of the Glorious Koran, New York, ١٩٥٣

will be followed by another life, and that the good and bad actions of this world will not .go unanswered for

And as a result he understands that there must be a way of life peculiarly suited to the .needs of man which will enable him to live according to his own real nature

Islam's choice of natural and primordial man as the object of the religious message :has several basic results

The Principle of Equality .۱

The Islamic teachings apply to all. There is no distinction between black and white, man and woman, noble and humble, rich and poor, king and beggar, strong and weak, eastern and western, learned and ignorant, old and young, or between those who are present and those who will come in the future, for all of these share human nature .and that which it implies in common

Equality of this sort is limited to Islam; other ways, each in its own measure, have certain discriminatory principles. For example, Hinduism distinguishes fundamentally between Brahmins and non- Brahmins and between man and woman; in Judaism a distinction is made between the children of Israel and the Gentiles, and in Christianity .between man and woman

As for secular social systems, in these there is a distinction between subjects of a country and foreigners. It is only Islam which considers humanity as one and has .uprooted completely the principle of distinction and discrimination

O mankind! Lo! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations" and tribes that ye may

know one another. Lo! the noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct." ((Qur'an ۴۹: ۱۳

Lo! I suffer not the work of any worker, male or female, to be lost. Ye proceed one" (from another." (Qur'an ۳:۱۹۵

.That is, male or female, you are all of the same human status

The Principle of Realism .۲

In view of the fact that man is provided with the instinct of seeking reality and of discerning between the real and the unreal, the laws and injunctions laid down by .Islam are based upon a correspondingly realistic view of things

This can be explained as follows: Although man in his natural activity is stimulated towards his vital goals by feelings and emotions, he in fact sets out after real goals, not illusion and fantasy. The newly born baby who cries in his hunger and reaches for his mother's breast in search of milk desires that which is milk in reality, not the .illusion of milk; he cries from real hunger, not from fantasy and imagination

Every individual who strives in the way of achieving his own interests seeks his own real interests, not their mental concept. In the same manner when feelings and emotions present certain desires to man, and without being able to take into account his true best-interest stimulate him toward certain goals, it is the faculty of discrimination or reason which harnesses and modifies these emotions and shows to man that which is in reality the good and the evil

.and the rightness and the wrongness of his action

It is reason, moreover, which forbids the sick person from eating harmful foods although he wishes to eat them; it is reason which prevents man from entering upon dangerous activities, hence depriving him of a large part of his freedom of action; it is reason which is man's single superiority over other animals, and his most important .faculty for distinguishing the real from the illusory

The laws and injunctions brought by the Prophet of Islam are based upon a realistic view of things, not upon the whims and fancies of men. That is to say that man must perform that action which is really and truly in his best interest even if it is against his fancy; and he must avoid that action which he feels like performing but which is not in .conformity with his real interests

The case of the religious community is the same: it must accomplish what is truly in its best interest and what is in conformity with its felicity, even though this act may be contrary to its wishes; it must not perform that action which is the wish of the majority .of its members but which is contrary to its true interest

In the language of the Holy Qur'an that which is in conformity with reality or with man's true best interest is called "The Truth" (al-Haqq). It is the single goal towards which man must direct his endeavor and after which he must

.strive

(After the Truth what is there saving error?" (Qur’an ۱۰:۳۳"

And if the Truth had followed their desires, verily the heavens and the earth and" .(whosoever is therein had been corrupted" (Qur’an ۲۳:۷۱

An almond nut which is placed in the ground under the necessary conditions will after a few days break its skin, and a green shoot will come forth from its kernel as well as a number of roots which are put forth in various directions; by way of the roots the shoot will take continuous nourishment from the ground and will constantly grow and develop until ultimately it becomes a fully grown almond tree with trunk, branches, .leaves blossoms and fruit

The sperm of an animal placed in the womb of the female of the species under particular circumstances will assume the form and shape peculiar to itself and by means of the activity peculiar to its species will day by day become larger and more .complete until it reaches the limit of its perfection

If we investigate in the same manner all of the creatures of the world one by one it will become perfectly obvious that for each of them there is a way peculiar to itself through which it reaches the limit of its own perfection, and that from the first day of .its coming into being it is attracted towards its end

In its development it never goes astray nor does it change its direction, as if, for example, an

almond shoot could develop into a horse or a horse could go to sleep one night and wake up the next morning an almond tree. Rather every creature is guided toward its final goal by means of creation itself, and in traversing this path of development it .never falls into error

The path which has been laid out for each creature leading to its final goal is one which is in conformity with the means and potentialities with which it was provided by its own nature. These means allow it to attract what is of benefit and repel what is harmful and threatens its existence. Chickens eat grain, sheep and cattle feed upon forage, and wolves, leopards and hawks hunt for game, for each is equipped with .particular digestive systems which are proper only for particular nutritive substances

In the same way, birds defend themselves with their beaks, sheep and cattle with their horns, scorpions and bees with their stings, lions and leopards with their teeth and claws, and deer by flight, for the defensive equipment of each of them is just this. In summary, each of these creatures moves in its life towards a particular goal and end. It performs actions in which the equipment provided by its very existence guides .it, and the nature of which this equipment determines

This guidance and determination is the same general guidance and determination :which the Qur'an has referred to and attributed to the Creator

Our Lord is He who gave unto"

(everything its nature, then guided it aright." (Qur’an ٢٠: ٥٠

Who createth, then disposeth; who measureth [i.e., determineth], then guideth."" .((Qur’an ٨٧: ٢-٣

Obviously, man also, who is one of the species of creation, is not an exception to this general rule. His natural disposition and character show to him the path which he should take in life, and point out and distinguish the duties and responsibilities which .he must fulfill

From what thing does he create him (man)? From a drop of seed. He createth him" .(and proportioneth him, then maketh the way easy for him." (Qur’an ٨٠: ١٨-٢٠

Meditation upon this and upon our previous discussion will show that the result of both of these discussions is the same, that is, that correct actions and deeds (those which are in conformity with man's true best interest)- which man must choose by means of his instinct of discerning between the real and the illusory-are the very same actions towards which the nature of man guides him, endowed as it is with its .own peculiar equipment

It is thus that the way towards which the Holy Qur’an invites man, which it has named "the Religion of the Truth", which it also refers to as the natural and primordial .religion, and attributes it to creation itself

So set they purpose (O Muhammad) for religion as a man by nature upright-the" nature (framed) of Allah, in which He hath created man. There is no altering (the laws of) Allah's creation. That is

.(the right religion." (Qur'an ٣٠:٣٠

By a soul and Him who perfected it, and inspired it (with conscience of) what is wrong" for it and (what is) right for it. He is indeed successful who causeth it to grow, and he is .(indeed a failure who stunteth it." (Qur'an ٩١:٧-١٠

From another point of view, since creation is the work of God and since every sort of beauty and appropriateness which is observable in it is the result of His Mercy, that which is appropriate to human nature inasmuch as it determines the actions which ."man must perform is called "the Will of God

This is of course the Will of God in as much as it ordains laws, guides men in his) actions, and holds him responsible for these actions; it is not the same as the Will of (.God inasmuch as it creates-which can never be disobeyed or violated

Likewise the duties and rules which result from that which is appropriate to man's .nature are called the commands and prohibitions of God

The Lord bringeth to pass what He willeth and chooseth. They (men) have never any" .(choice." (Qur'an ٢٨:٦٨

Since the religion of Islam consists of duties and commands from God, the Creator, and since the person who follows its doctrinal and practical injunctions has submitted himself to the Will of God, in the language of the Holy Qur'an this religion is called .(""Islam" ("submission" or "surrender

Lo! religion with Allah (is) the Surrender. (Qur'an"

.(۱۹ :۳

And whoso seeketh as religion other than the Surrender (to Allah) it will not be" .(accepted from him." (Qur'an ۳: ۸۵

The Principle of Equilibrium between the Material and the Spiritual .۳

The third result of Islam's message being directed at natural man, a result which is indeed one of the great achievements of this religion, is that a middle way is taken .between materiality and spirituality

This is in contrast to Judaism, which, as can be observed in its Holy Book, the Torah, is not concerned with spiritual matters, and with Christianity, which on the contrary-according to the explicit sayings of Jesus-is not concerned with the material life of this .world

Other religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism and even Zoroastrianism, Manicheanism and Sabeanism, which to one degree or another are concerned with spiritual things, have separated the spiritual way from material life, to the extent that .the connection between the two has been totally severed

It is only Islam which chooses the middle way and bases itself upon the foundation of primordial human nature. towards his God, and include expressions of servitude in the face of His Lordship, poverty and need in the face of His Wealth and Independence, lowliness in the face of His Grandeur, insignificance in the face of His Majesty and Glory, ignorance in the face of His Knowledge, incapacity in the face of His Power, and .submission in the face of His Will

Moreover, to the extent possible these expressions have been given a social character, such as in the case of the

groups which gather for the daily congregational prayers, the larger groups which meet for Friday prayers, and the still larger gathering which takes place at the time of .the pilgrimage to Mecca

A second portion of these injunctions concern duties which man has in social surroundings and in relation with his fellow man. Of course in these duties, which are the Islamic laws, the sense of responsibility towards God has been taken into account, for man must surrender only to His Will (that is, the requirements of His creation). In other words, all actions must be performed in the shadow of the three basic principles .of Islam: Divine Unity, Prophecy, and the Last Day

Say: O People of the Scripture [Jews and Christians]! Come to an agreement between" us and you: that we shall worship none but Allah, and that we shall ascribe no partners unto Him, and that none of us shall take others for lords beside Allah. And if they turn away, then say: Bear witness that we are they who have surrendered (unto Him)." .((Qur'an ۳: ۶۴

From the previous discussion it has become clear that in the religion of Islam the path to be followed in life has been ordered and arranged in such a way that man's social .and material life resembles a cradle in which the spiritual life is nurtured

The inner spiritual light of the practicing Muslim is such that all of his individual and social actions contribute to purifying his soul and

strengthening its radiance. Although outwardly he is with people, inwardly he is with God, and although he is in the midst of a crowd, he dwells in the spiritual retreat of the .divine secret

At the same time that he is running here and there in pursuit of material goals, and is undergoing a series of events both bitter and sweet, pleasant and unpleasant, beautiful and ugly, and in general is involved in the events of the tumultuous external world, his heart is free and exists in a world of tranquility in which he sees the Face of .God wherever he looks

.(And whither so ever ye turn, there is Allah's countenance". (Qur'an ۲: ۱۱۵"

A pious Muslim extends his spiritual life into every aspect of his material life. Wherever he is and whatever he is doing he is in contact with God. Everything with which he .occupies himself in the material world is a mirror in which he sees God reflected

On the other hand, non-Muslims who turn towards the spiritual life imagine that their natural and every-day life is a veil between themselves and the Truth they are seeking. As a result they are forced to abandon normal life and to assume an .unaccustomed manner of living in their quest after spiritual perfection

Whatever the advantages of such a way, from the point of view of a person who lives a normal life it is a difficult road to follow and one in which to persevere requires an

extreme degree of will power. However, the person who follows the spiritual life according to the directives of Islam knows full well that such a way is easier than that of Islam, for such people, by abandoning every-day life, have taken the easy way out .and have fled from the difficulty of continual vigil and effort

They have set a barrier in the road towards perfection which creation itself and the means it has put at man's disposal have prepared. Such men have set out on a path of their own fancy, and it is questionable whether they will ever reach the goal which .creation has determined for them

In addition, given that the world and all it contains are the creation of God and that the phenomena of the world, each according to the measure of its own existence, are signs of the Truth and mirrors displaying God, and given that man along with the various conditions which mark his primordial nature is one of these signs, then it is necessary that in the spiritual life (the way of knowledge of self and of God) God be .recognized in every situation

All of these mirrors must be utilized in the acquisition of divine knowledge and in the contemplation of God's Beauty, for if this is not the case man will gain nothing more .from his labors than an imperfect knowledge or a perfect ignorance

Knowledge and Wisdom from the Point of view of Islam .۴

The person who has made a cursory study of the religions and creeds of the

world will have no doubt that the dignity and honor which Islam has accorded to knowledge and wisdom and the extent to which it has encouraged their acquisition is unparalleled in any other religion or ideology, whether revealed or non-revealed. It is ,the Holy Qur'an which asks

,(Are those who know equal to those who do not?" (Qur'an ۳۹: ۹"

and which praises the exalted station of knowledge in the most eloquent manner. And :it is the Holy Prophet who has said

- ,The pursuit of knowledge is incumbent upon every Muslim"
- "Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave“
- ".Seek knowledge, even unto China"

Again, it is the Holy Qur'an which commands its followers never to stray from the way of knowledge nor to follow what is only supposed or assumed, and never to accept without deliberation what passes before their sight or crosses their minds, for they .will be responsible for their beliefs

O man), follow not that where of thou hast no knowledge. Lo! the hearing and the)" .(sight and the heart-of each of these it will be asked." (Qur'an ۱۷: ۳۶

As has become clear Islam encourages its followers to acquire knowledge with all the powers at their disposal, and in this respect it has designated knowledge of religious jurisprudence or doctrinal sciences, and the injunctions of the religious law (Shari'ah) .as mandatory

And the believers should not all go out to fight [in the holy war]. Of every troop of“ them, a party should go

forth, that they (who are left behind) may gain sound knowledge in religion." (Qur'an ۹: ۱۲۲).

A point which must be kept in mind is that the capacity of individuals for the comprehension of scientific and intellectual truth varies. There are people who have no talent for logical thought and who, with their simple minds, live in a surrounding of physical labor and on a level of purely material life, where there are others whose thought is logical and who by their very nature take a special joy in comprehending profound concepts and scientific theories.

Still others have cut their attention from both thought and physical labor and, having a special aversion for the dark world of matter and its deceiving beauty and fleeting pleasures, find in themselves a particular attraction towards the transcendent world and a peculiar fascination for its lasting and infinite beauty, of which the beauty of this world is only the reflected image. Such men easily comprehend the verities and mysteries of the transcendent world by means of inner illumination.

It is with a view to this diversity, which is clearly visible among men, that Islam instructs each of these three groups in its own terms and language. One group it has taught by means of the external and formal aspect of religion and a second group by way of intellectual demonstration, while the third group it has instructed to struggle against the carnal soul and to purify the heart. In the same way, in the

:Qur’an God has struck a similitude about His Own utterances and expressions

He sendeth down water from the sky, so that valleys flow according to their" .(measure." (Qur’an ١٣: ١٧

:The Holy Prophet has said

We prophets have been commanded to speak to men according to the measure of" ".their understandings

Those among its followers who have not the taste for rational demonstration and who would face the danger of error and deviation if they were to attempt to traverse this path, Islam has charged with no more than the measure of their ability, and beyond the three principles of religion (Divine Unity, Prophecy and the Last Judgement) it only instills them with simple practical injunctions such as command to do good and prohibitions from committing evil; this type of formulation is found in a great number .of Qur’anic verses and in saying of the Prophet and the Shi'ite Imams

Of course in the case of the three principles of religion man in his primordial nature can engage in a simple form of rational demonstration, and hence he will have accepted nothing but definitely proven knowledge. And in fact this method provides him with rational proof of the remaining teachings and injunctions which he has accepted without rational demonstration, for the truth of the principle of prophecy proves in a definitive manner the validity of all of the saying which have reached us .from the Prophet

The way of rational demonstration-Islam teaches those people who are endowed with sound minds

and who have the capacity to comprehend scientific theories and intellectual and logical arguments through logical and rational demonstration. In other words, it guides them towards that which their uncorrupted and reality-seeking primordial nature immediately perceives. It does not first impose upon them its doctrines and .beliefs and then defend these by reasoning and proofs

The Book and the Tradition, that is, the verses of the Holy Qur’an and the sayings of the Prophet and of the Shi'ite Imams-which make clear the meaning and purpose of the Qur’anic verses-are full of this type of rational demonstration. In them the Islamic beliefs and doctrines are explained in detail by means of the simplest forms of expression and the most convincing proofs, and likewise, mention is made in them of the general and universal benefits and advantages of the Islamic laws and .injunctions

Obviously, we must not overlook the fact that the meaning of discussion and demonstration of the benefits and advantages of the Islamic laws and injunctions is not that if an individual Muslim or Islamic society in general does not understand a particular injunction, that injunction should be rejected. For as we have already mentioned, these laws were promulgated by means of prophecy, and the proof of the validity of prophecy is a summary proof of the validity of these laws, even if we do not .possess the detailed reason for this

The way of purification of the soul-The third group of men are those who are ready and eager

to sever all material attachments and to turn their attention away from the deceiving adornments and illusory desires of this world. Such men are prepared to forget all that is other than God and to close their eyes to every beauty and ugliness and every sweet and bitter experience of this transient and illusory existence.

Opening the eye of discernment towards the eternal world, they are prepared to contemplate without the veil of materiality the radiance of the Majesty and Grandeur of God, to traverse the stages of human perfection which must be crossed upon leaving this fleeting life, and to enter into the Proximity of the Divine. With such men Islam converses secretly of the divine mysteries in a language which they alone understand, and thus it guides them from the depths of ignorance to the pinnacle of knowledge and wisdom.

A Possible Criticism and its Answer

A number of orientalists have said that Islamic mystical and metaphysical doctrines have been borrowed from those of India, for Islam in itself is no more than a series of extremely concrete and simple beliefs and sterile forms of worship. The succinct reply to these claims is provided nicely by the words of the poet: "O Sweetheart, the difficulty is that you're no judge of words."

We, of course, in our answer to this criticism, do not wish to defend Islam from the point of view of its mystics and engage in proving the validity and originality in the face of Indian mysticism of the various ways

which they have traversed on the spiritual path. In the same way, in our discussion of rational demonstration we were not concerned with analyzing and proving the validity of all the books on philosophy written by Muslims, and in our discussion of the way of the formal aspects of religion we did not declare as correct the way of the generality .of Muslims whatever it might be

Rather, our goal in this article is limited to a general survey of the original and genuine Islamic sources, that is, the Book and the Tradition, without concerning ourselves with agreeing or disagreeing with the activities and conduct of any particular one of the .foregoing classes of men

The claim of the above-mentioned orientalists is based upon the principle of evolution, according to which the development and perfection of a natural phenomena is explained in a scientific manner. This principle has been generalized to include every sort of happening in whatever sphere, even habits, customs and phenomena of a spiritual nature. Thus the root cause of every event is sought in preceding events. According to the same principle it has been said that Islamic laws were borrowed from those of the Romans and Islamic doctrines from the .philosophical ideas of the Greeks

These orientalists have been mistaken in their judgement in two respects. First, they have considered what is called "mystical intuition" to be of the same order as normal thought and hence they have imagined that the knowledge gained by purification of

the soul is a system of poetical thoughts, much as if a poet with his overflowing and creative imagination and his eloquent means of expression could voice such concepts .better than a mystic knower of the divine secrets

A similar mistake is made in the case of revelation, which is the celestial perception of prophets and the means of receiving divine sciences and laws. As a result, the basic source of Islamic doctrine and injunctions is represented as being Greek thought and .Roman law

This mistake is perfectly obvious in the discussions carried on about prophecy and the "mode of thought" of prophets. Moreover, the words and utterances which have reached us from the prophets-whether their claim to prophecy be true or not-openly .contradict such opinions

The second mistake is that, even if we accept the theory of evolution as proven and definitely established, this theory must not be taken as providing the reason for the manifestation of an instinctive drive. For, an instinct placed within a species' primordial nature at its creation will be manifested within each individual of that species (provided there be no external impediment), whether or not there is a .precedent

As a case in point it can be said that diversity in foodstuffs and the preparation of sophisticated cuisine was learned by the Arabs from the Persians, but it cannot be said that the Arabs learned how to eat from the Persians. Likewise, it can be said that democratic government with its manifold administrative organizations

spread to the East from the West, but this cannot be said about the very art of .forming a society and establishing a government

In our previous discussion it became clear that the way of purification of the soul, that is, the spiritual life and mystical intuition, is innate within the nature of man; once awakened through the necessary groundwork and the removal of obstacles, it will .direct man to enter upon the path of spiritual illumination

Hence, religion, which by its very nature is concerned to one degree or another with the transcendent and eternal world, cannot but cause the appearance of certain among its followers, who, this hidden urge having been awakened within them, will sever all attachments with this fleeting world full of pain and hardship, and with the hope of absolute bliss and serenity will concern themselves with the eternal abode. And in practice also we see that in every one of the world's religions there exists a .group enamored of the spiritual life and mystical way

By comparing the presentation of spiritual matters in the basic texts of the world's religions it can be clearly observed that the texts of Islam have concerned themselves with the description of everlasting felicity and the external world more than the texts .of other religions

Therefore, the appearance of the way of the purification of the soul within Islam is perfectly natural, without there being the need for any relationship as to its origins with India or with any

other place. Furthermore, as history is there to prove, a large number of the companions of ‘Ali (the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet and the first Shi'ite Imam) such as Salman, Kumayl, Rashid, Maytham and Uways were under his direct spiritual guidance and instruction at a time when Islam had not yet reached India and .when there could be no question of contact with Indian thought

The fact that the chains of spiritual initiation (silsilah) of practically all of the Sufi .orders in Islam reach back to Ali further corroborates this point

The Difference in Means of Expression between Islamic and other Mysticisms

The delicate and refined expressions of Islamic mystical doctrine in contrast to the formulation of other mysticisms, and especially to that of the Indians, has the advantage of elucidating mystical verities within the wrapping of formulations of a more general nature. Hence, everyone is able to profit from them, each in the .measure of his understanding. Other mystical ways do not possess this distinction

It is for this same reason that Islam has been saved from the harmful results, which have affected other religions, by presenting mystical truths openly and unambiguously. For example, in the case of Indian mysticism, if we study the Upanishads carefully, we will see that the doctrine presented there is a precise and extremely profound expression of the Unity of God, but at the same time that it is so bold and explicit that any one who refers to it who is not completely versed in mystical and metaphysical doctrine will consider

its marvelously complete formulations as nothing but superstitious prattle, or at the very least he will interpret passages which express the Unity of God in the most sublime manner as being nothing but incarnationism, pantheism and idol worship.

This claim, moreover, is proved by the opinions which many orientalists who have specialized in Sanskrit have voiced concerning Indian mysticism; for after the tremendous amount of research which they have undertaken in the original Hindu and Buddhist texts they still consider Indian mystical doctrines as nothing but superstition, produced by the minds of men deprived of the advantages of life. And the basic reason for all such opinions on the part of orientalists is the explicitness and the shocking nature of the bold formulations of these texts.

Further Consideration of the Islamic Message

In the same way that God's creation has placed a particular kind of material life within the reach of mankind and has not discriminated among men but has equipped each of them with equal means, it has also placed the spiritual life, which is hidden behind the veil of material life, within the reach of all men.

And in the same way that the perfection of the material life of man lies in the manifestation and actualization of all his positive and negative actions and deeds-which he performs by means of his body-so also creation has extended the perfection of the spiritual life to include all of those actions and deeds.

In harmony with creation, Islam has considered the spiritual life to belong

to all men and has made no distinction between them, and likewise it has extended the spiritual life to all the positive and negative aspects of men's lives. It invites men to accept the ties of social life and to act in a positive manner in traversing a determined path. In teaching this way it has had recourse to indications enclosed in the covering .of normal and every-day expressions

This is because our verbal formulations are in case born of the thoughts of the generality of men. We use them in our social and material life in order to facilitate mutual understanding, and by means of them we exchange thoughts and mental concepts. Now mystical and contemplative comprehension, which is rarer than the elixir of life and which throughout history has never found general acceptance, is .something completely different from normal human expression

The person who wants to formulate into concepts the knowledge gained through intuitive and mystical comprehension is like the person who tries to describe by means of words the colors of the rainbow to one blind from birth. And the person who puts contemplative and mystical insights into the mold of words is exactly like the .person who carries water from place to place with a sieve

It is for this reason that Islam has had recourse to symbols and intimations in expressing mystical truths, and has thus remained untouched by the misfortunes .which have overtaken other religions

A Brief Consideration of the Spiritual Path

It may possibly be imagined that the claim

that Islam has expounded the mystical way by means of intimations and symbols is unfounded and amounts to chasing false ghosts. However, sufficient meditation upon Islamic teachings and formulations, and a weighing of these against the agitated and ecstatic states of the Islamic mystics, will prove the opposite and will show that hidden within themselves and by allusion these teachings elucidate all of the stages of perfection which are traversed on the mystical way, although a true and detailed .comprehension of these states is only possible through mystical intuition

The travellers on the spiritual path, who as a result of their natural and primordial readiness have surrendered their hearts to the infinite Beauty and Perfection of the Truth, worship God only out of love, not out of hope for reward or fear of punishment, for to worship Him in order to gain Paradise or to avoid hell is in fact to worship that .very reward and punishment in place of God

As a result of the divine attraction which has engulfed their hearts, and more particularly as a result of having seen that God has revealed the verse

(Therefore remember Me, I will remember you" (Qur'an ۲: ۱۵۲"

and hundreds of other Qur'anic verses where the remembrance of God is spoken of, wherever and in whatever state they happen to be the mystic travelers are occupied " :with His remembrance

.(Such as remember Allah, standing, sitting and reclining." (Qur'an ۳: ۱۹۱"

,And when they hear the messages of the Beloved

!Lo"

,(in the heavens and the earth are portents for believers" (Qur'an ۴۵: ۳

,(And there is not a thing by hymneth His praise" (Qur'an ۱۷: ۴۴"

And

,(And whither so ever ye turn, there is Allah's countenance" (Qur'an ۲: ۱۱۵"

they understand that all existent things are mirrors, each displaying the unique Beauty of the Truth in accordance with the possibilities of its own being. Other than .their quality of being mirrors they have no existence in themselves

Hence such men look to every phenomenon with love and eagerness and have no object other than to contemplate the Beauty of God. And when they hear God's messages

O ye who believe! Ye have charge of your own souls. He who erreth cannot injure" (you if you are rightly guided (Qur'an ۵:۱۰۵

and

Thou, verily, O man, art working towards thy Lord a work which thou wilt meet (in His" ,(presence)" (Qur'an ۸۴: ۶

they understand that by the nature of creation itself they are bound within the framework of their own souls, and other than the way of their souls there is no road .open to them to reach God

Whatever they see or find in the expansiveness of the world they see and find in themselves. It is here that man understands that in fact he is cut off from all places .and things and other than he himself and his God there is no one else

Even if such a person is in the midst of a hundred thousand people

he is alone, and if others see him in the midst of a crowd, he sees himself in a spiritual retreat far away from everyone else, no one being with him but God. It is then that he looks at himself and sees all things within himself, and he understands that he himself is also only a mirror in which the unique Beauty of God is manifested, and that he has .nothing but God

When he has remembered God in this fashion and has cleansed his heart and emptied it of vanity and frivolity, the remembrance of God becomes firmly fixed within his soul and he enters among the ranks of the people of certainty (al-yaqin) and God's .promise

(And serve thy Lord till the inevitable (al-yaqin) cometh unto thee" (Qur'an ۱۵: ۹۹"

is fulfilled. The doors of the kingdom of the heavens and the earth open to him and he .sees that all things are possessed absolutely by God

Thus did We show Abraham the kingdom of the heavens and the earth that he might" .(be of those possessing certainty." (Qur'an ۶: ۷۵

The person endowed with such a vision will behold the three stages of Divine Unity. First the Unity of God in His Acts will be revealed to him. He will see with certainty that it is God who directs the Universe and all that it contains, and that the innumerable causes and agents which are at work in the world, whether theirs be the activity of

free will or of necessity, are all painted upon the canvass of creation by His all-powerful Hand. Cause and effect and the relationship between the two-each is .brought into being and executed by the One

And unto Allah belongeth the Sovereignty of the heavens and the earth." (Qur'an ۴۵:" .(۲۷

Secondly the Unity of God's Names and Qualities will be disclosed to him and he will see without intermediary that every quality of perfection which appears in the world, and likewise every quality of beauty and of majesty, whether life, knowledge, power, might, grandeur or whatever, is a glimmer from the infinite Source of Light which is the Truth, and that these qualities shine forth through the variegated windows which .are the existences of things with the distinctions they possess

.(Allah's are the fairest names. (Qur'an, ۷:۱۸۰"

Finally in the third stage of Divine Unity he will behold that all of these varied qualities are the manifestations of an infinite Essence, and that in reality each of them is .identical with every other and all are identical with the Essence Itself

.(Say: Allah is the Creator of all things, and He is the One, the Almighty." (Qur'an ۱۳:۱۶"

The Superiority of Islam in the Doctrine of Divine Unity

The above are the three stages which the lovers of the Truth in the various religions of the world pass through. When they begin their travel on the way of spiritual perfection they take these stages to be their final goal. Islam, however, does not limit itself to these stages

but delineates a goal for its followers which is even higher and which surpasses the .goal formulated in the text of any other religion

For, it does not stop at negating all limitations from God and considering Him as infinite and transcendent over all qualification, but it goes so far as to negate from Him this very quality of Infinity (since every quality [even that of Infinity] cannot help (.but "qualify" and so limit that to which it is attributed

Hence the Divine Essence is considered as transcending all names and designations and even as transcending this very description. The sixth Shi'ite Imam, Ja'far al-Sadiq, according to a tradition which is quoted by al-Kulayni in the book Usul-al-kafi, has :deduced this stage from the following verse of the Holy Qur'an

Say (unto mankind): Cry unto Allah, or cry unto the Beneficient, unto whichsoever ye" . (cry (it is the same) . His are the most beautiful names." (Qur'an ١٧: ١١٠

However, since further elucidation of this doctrine would mean that we must enter a philosophical discussion which is not in keeping with the nature of the present article, .for the present we must leave this aside

Sanctity in God

The followers of the path towards perfection from the beginning of their journey until the point where they reach final peace witness a great deal which must remain hidden from the eyes and hearts of the earth-bound inhabitants of the material world, and a consideration of these states and stations would be

beyond the scope of the present article. What is important here is the question of .(sanctity in God (Wilayat-Ilahi

When the travellers on the spiritual path reach the stage of Divine Unity and enter into the proximity of God, they let go totally of what they had possessed up to that .time, for they have come to know that everything belongs to God

They give up the false claim of "owning" things and of being independent in this ownership. It is then that an indescribable tranquility and repose comes over them .and they are released absolutely from all pain, fear and sorrow

Lo! those who say: Our Lord is Allah, and afterward are upright, the angels descend" upon them saying: Fear not nor grieve, but hear good tidings of the paradise which ye are promised. We are your protecting friends in the life of the world and in the .(Hereafter." (Qur'an ۴۱: ۳۰-۳۱

Lo! verily the friends of Allah [those who possess sanctity, wilayah] are (those) on .(whom fear (cometh) not, nor do they grieve." (Qur'an ۱۰: ۶۳

It is at this point that worldly joys, sorrows, successes and failures appear to them as all the same, and having found a new existence they view the world and all that it .contains in a new light

His he who was dead and We have raised him unto life, and set for him a light" wherein he walketh among men, as him whose similitude is in utter darkness?" .((Qur'an ۶:۱۲۲

And

in the end they and everything they possess belongs to God, and God to them: ".“Whoso is near to God, God is nigh unto him

Conclusion

From our discussion it has become clear that the spiritual life in Islam is wider in its scope and more profound in its depth than what is found in other religions, for, as we have explained, Islam in its breadth has laid down detailed guidelines for all of the possible situations of human existence, whether as regards this world or the next; .and in its upward flight and its depth it aims at a goal beyond that of other creeds

About center

In the name of Allah

هَلْيَسْتَوِيالَّذِينَيَعْلَمُونَوَالَّذِينَلَايَعْلَمُونَ

?Are those who know equal to those who do not know

al-Zumar: ۹

:Introduction

Ghaemiyeh Computer Research Institute of Isfahan, from ۲۰۰۷, under the authority of Ayatollah Haj SayyedHasanFaqihImami (God blesses his soul), by sincere and daily efforts of university and seminary elites and sophisticated groups began its activities .in religious, cultural and scientific fields

:Manifesto

Ghaemiyeh Computer Research Institute of Isfahan in order to facilitate and accelerate the accessibility of researchers to the books and tools of research, in the field of Islamic science, and regarding the multiplicity and dispersion of active centers in this field

and numerous and inaccessible sources by a mere scientific intention and far from any kind of social, political, tribal and personal prejudices and currents, based on performing a project in the shape of (management of produced and published works from all Shia centers) tries to provide a rich and free collection of books and research papers for the experts, and helpful contents and discussions for the educated generation and all classes of people interested in reading, with various formats in the .cyberspace

:Our Goals are

(propagating the culture and teachings of Thaqalayn (Quran and Ahlulbayt p.b.u.t-

encouraging the populace particularly the youth in investigating the religious issues-

replacing useful contents with useless ones in the cellphones, tablets and computers-

providing services for seminary and university researchers-

spreading culture study in the publich-

paving the way for the publications and authors to digitize their works-

:Policies

acting according to the legal licenses-

relationship with similar centers-

avoiding parallel working-

merely presenting scientific contents-

mentioning the sources-

.It's obvious that all the responsibilities are due to the author

:Other activities of the institute

Publication of books, booklets and other editions-

Holding book reading competitions-

Producing virtual, three dimensional exhibitions, panoramas of religious and tourism- places

.Producing animations, computer games and etc-

Launching the website with this address: www.ghaemiyeh.com-

Fabricatingdramatic and speech works-

Launching the system of answering religious, ethical and doctrinal questions-

Designing systems of accounting, media and mobile, automatic and handy systems,- web kiosks

Holding virtual educational courses for the public-

Holding virtual teacher-training courses-

Producing thousands of research software in three languages (Persian, Arabic and- English) which can be performed in computers, tablets and cellphones and available and downloadable with eight international formats: JAVA, ANDROID, EPUB, CHM, PDF, HTML, CHM, GHB on the website

Also producing four markets named "Ghaemiyeh Book Market" with Android, IOS,- WINDOWS PHONE and WINDOWS editions

:Appreciation

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